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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the attitudes of adult learners toward the Board of Governors (BOG) bachelor's degree program at Chicago State University. The study also examined characteristics and types of adult learners, availability and kinds of services adult learners want, relevance of coursework, biases from campus officials toward nontraditional students, and social integration with the traditional-student body. Various definitions of adult learners were explored, and adult student motivation was examined as revealed in the literature. The sample of 66 BOG graduates from 1995 returned 20 usable questionnaires. (Adult learners were defined as part-time students over age 25 who had full-time jobs and/or other responsibilities.) The majority of adult learners thought the BOG program met their expectations and needs. Findings included the following: (1) 42 percent indicated that they would have enrolled in correspondence or telecourses; (2) 39 percent indicated that campus policies, student life, and campus facilities do not meet the needs of nontraditional-degree students; (3) 2 percent indicated that the BOG degree is more relevant than a traditional degree; (4) 39 percent said they were not discriminated against; (5) 36 percent said nontraditional students were socially integrated with traditional students; and (6) half the students indicated that their degree led to career advancement. (Contains 16 references.) (KC)

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ATTITUDES OF ADULT LEARNERS TOWARD THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE PROGRAM AT CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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ATTITUDES OF ADULT LEARNERS TOWARD THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE PROGRAM AT CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Michael A. Thompson-Davenport

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of adult learners toward the Board of Governors (BOG) Bachelor of Arts Degree Program at Chicago State University. This study will also examine characteristics and types of adult learners, availability and kinds of services adult learners want, relevance of coursework, biases from campus officials toward nontraditional students, and social integration with the traditional-student body.

Many adult learners are unable to follow the rigidity of traditional-degree programs, (Fisher 1985) stated that adults know what they want and need to learn and that adult learners are more likely to be parents and spouses employed at one or more jobs, travelers, community activists, ex-offenders, veterans, volunteers, etc. Adult learners enroll in the BOG program for three (3) reasons which are to obtain a bachelor of arts degree, to advance in the current professions, or to seek career changes.

Since 1973, the Illinois Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities has been offering a special and unique type of Bachelor of Arts Degree through its five universities (Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Northeastern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University). This program was designed to meet the educational needs of most adult learners who wish to complete their college education.

Campus administrators, faculty, and staff have noticed a new-student body, adult learners. These older-than-average students have made campus officials rethink their positions on adult education. Poison (1994) stated that "Unlike many younger students, college is *not* a full-time occupation for adults and that college is usually secondary" (p. 22). If it is found that attitudes are negative toward the BOG program, university officials must be 'forced' to re-investigate their efforts to retain older-then-average students. If it is found that attitudes are favorable toward the BOG program, university officials have listened to adult learners and will continue to meet the needs of their older-than-average population. Consequently, this study will lead to a better understanding of who adult learners are and their needs.

Before an attempt can be made to determine the attitudes and needs of adult learners, it is imperative to define the term *adult learner* and describe the attributes of a nontraditional-degree program. Cross (1980) stated that the term *nontraditional students* is generally used to describe adult part-time learners who carry full-time adult responsibilities in addition to their studies.

Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) added that the most common usage refers to students over the age 25; Benshoff and Lewis (1992) stated that these students also may be referred to as *adult students*, *re-entry students*, *returning students*, and *adult learners*. A nontraditional-degree program emphasizes career advancement and is self-directed to meet the immediate and/or future needs of adult learners. Pierson and Springer (1988) stated that graduates of the program...felt that a nontraditional-degree program contributed solely to salary increases and career mobility.

Knowles (1990) cited six assumptions about adult learners: (1) the need to know; (2) the learners' self-concept; (3) the roles of the learners' experiences; (4) readiness to learn; (5) orientation to learning; and (6) motivation. Knowles further explained that

> Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it; adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions...; adults come into an educational activity with a greater volume and a different quality of experiences; adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their "real-life" situations; and, ...adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning (pp. 55-63).

Although Knowles made valid assumptions, he did not state or provide any reasons for drop-out and return to education. Benshoff and Lewis (1992) stated that "They [adult learners] dropped-out of education for a number of reasons, including financial considerations, competing responsibilities, lack of focus, motivation, and maturity. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) added that changing job requirements or career changes often 'force' adults to get additional education to survive or advance in the job market" (p. 2); Richter-Antion (1986) noted six factors that distinguished older students from younger students:

1. The sense of purpose;
2. the nature of the financial commitment;
3. the nature of time commitments;
4. the difference in life experience;
5. the lack of an age cohort; and,
6. the concept of social acceptability (59-61).

Adults usually attended college with a clear purpose, and most were in school because they want to be there. Adults usually paid their own way and wanted value for their money. They did not want waste time, and they were more demanding of professors who are used to the more casual attitudes of many younger students. Adults usually have more commitments on their time than did younger students. Adult students have more life experiences to draw from and to bring to their studies. Adult development theory has shown that adults pass a series of developmental stages..., and they are constantly

bucking the traditional system of education since they have passed the socially-acceptable times in their lives for attending college (pp. 59-62).

Houle (1961) identified three (3) types of adult learners: (1) goal-oriented; (2) activity-oriented; and (3) learning-oriented. Houle further explained that goal-oriented adults are in episodes, each of which begins with the realization of a need or the identification of an interest. All of the activity-oriented adults identified in his study were course-takers and group joiners; it was social-contact they sought. Learning-oriented adults are avid readers and have been since childhood; they join groups, classes, and organizations for education sake.

There is no doubt that adult learners have greater needs then traditional-age students; therefore, adult learners have numerous concerns about the availability and types of services for them. Rawlins (1979) suggested the following recommendations to retain and service adult learners:

1. It would be wise to have provisions for waiving prerequisites for specific programs or courses.
2. Testing out of classes could be encouraged when adult learners have had life experiences or gainful employment.
3. Criteria for awarding financial aid could be based on need rather than grades, test scores, or class rank.
4. Registration during evening hours for the working adults.
5. Most university services could plan to be open during the late afternoon and evening at least one day per week.
6. A "guide to returnees" brochure with information about all services of the institution could be developed and mailed to adult learners.
7. Tutorial services could be expanded to offer more sessions during the day and evening.
8. The Extension Division, the Counseling Center, and the Admissions Office could develop and provide these services jointly: orientation; redevelopment of study skills and opportunities to meet with other adult students.
9. The initial enrollment process should be eased for returning adults. The Adult and Continuing Education Department and the Extension Division could provide staff development for divisions providing student personnel services, particularly those of admissions, financial aid, the Counseling Center, VA campus office, registration, and advising.
10. It would be beneficial to form a task force to give immediate consideration to the implementation of these recommendations. Each office that has a direct-relationship with students should be represented (p. 142).

Giezkowski (1995) stated that curricula in most cases were inappropriate for middle-aged students who have already lived through a good deal of contemporary history since they have developed a comprehensive view of the world through their experiences. He further stated that curricula must be consistent with the university's statement of its mission and goals; curricula should respond to the needs of students who actually enroll and are likely to enroll in the near future; and curricula should have a range of support across programs within the university, curricula usually contain a conflict of interest which should be observed, and curricula sometimes adversely affect the university's commitment. "An adult student might find a course in group dynamics or conflict resolution more valuable, for example, as general education than one in Spanish or French" (p. 13).

Fisher (1985) stated that adults may seek to be excused from required courses if they feel as though they have already mastered the subjects; adult learners may also seek to combine courses into an often unusual sequence in order to prepare for particular positions or to transfer other institutions.

Many concerns from adult learners reflect their treatment from faculty. For faculty, Steitz (1985) suggested the following:

1. Faculty should be prepared to recognize and logically answer adults' questions and challenges as to meaning and relevance of procedures and essential subject matter.
2. Faculty should be prepared to encourage and facilitate adult students both individually and as a group.
3. Faculty should be prepared to become more authoritative with regard to their course management.
4. Faculty should be prepared to allow and encourage adult learners to voice their relevant experiences and opinions.
5. Faculty should be prepared to establish less authority and power arrangement in classrooms with adult students.

Bauer (1981) suggested that faculty often perceive adult students as inferior to traditional students, and many adult students evoke displeasure in some faculty due to their approaches to education. Gilley and Hawkes (1989) surmised that a much better approach for accommodating the needs of the new-student population would be recognize it as a rich body of human resources and incorporate it into a new, stronger academic community (236). Johnson (1979) concluded that workshops using faculty, administrators, nontraditional student-speakers, and groups leaders from institutions successfully serving adult students may facilitate an attitude of adult acceptance and encouragement by faculty.

Bishop-Clark and Lewis (1992) identified that nontraditional students tend to treat faculty as peers, and younger students often view faculty as an authority and are unapproachable. They further added that "The older students feel faculty are uninterested in

teaching them, and faculty would prefer the traditional-classroom environment" (p. 115).

Another important issue in the literature on adult learners is social integration with the traditional-student body. Porter (1992) stated that social-life tends to be centered around fraternities, sororities, and athletic activities which "cater" to traditional-age students. Beyond this immediate sense of belonging, Gilley and Hawkes (1989) added that adult learners often felt like second-class citizens in institutions where policies and procedures, class scheduling, student life, and campus facilities were geared to serve traditional-age students.

Literature on adult learners appears to be more concerned with the examination of the characteristics and types of adult learners, availability and services to adult learners, relevance of coursework, biases from campus officials toward nontraditional students, and social integration with the traditional-student body.

Questions of the study are the following:

1. Do campus college policies, procedures, student-life, and campus facilities meet the needs of nontraditional-degree students?
2. Is the BOG nontraditional degree relevant?
3. Are nontraditional students discriminated against by campus officials?
4. Are nontraditional students socially integrated with the traditional-degree student body?
5. Does the nontraditional degree lead to increased career advancement?
6. Does the nontraditional degree have as much prestige as a traditional degree?

Following are three statements based on the expectations and needs of adult learners which are driving forces in the literature about them: (1) Adult learners will agree that the BOG program meets the expectations and needs of nontraditional-degree students; (2) adult learners will agree that the BOG degree does lead to faster career advancement, and they will refer the BOG program to other older-than-average students as measured by the Thompson-Davenport Adult-Learner Survey; (3) adult learners will not significantly agree that the BOG program meets the expectations and needs of nontraditional-degree students.

Procedures

Population/Sample:

The population includes sixty-six BOG graduates from fall, spring and spring 1995. There were a total of 164 graduates. This study includes a sample of thirty-six graduates from the fall, spring, and summer 1995 term. Twenty usable returns were received from BOG graduates.

The survey was mailed to BOG graduates from fall, spring, and summer 1995. The purpose of the survey was explained in the cover letter; instructions were provided for the completion of the survey; and instructions were given for the return of the surveys. The survey entitled "The Thompson-Davenport Adult-Learner Survey," which was used to measure attitudes of adult learners toward the BOG program, was mailed to BOG graduates from fall, spring, and summer 1995.

The survey was divided into five categories with two categories per category:

1. Alternatives to traditional classes.
2. Availability of classes.
3. Perception of adult learners made by university officials.
4. Social integration of nontraditional students with the traditional-student body.
5. Adult learners who would recommend the BOG program to other adult learners.

The instrument was pilot-tested on ten earlier graduates from the BOG program who were not included in the study. The findings of this study will have some limitations:

1. The findings are applicable only to the population.
2. The population may not be co-operative.
3. BOG graduates may not respond truthfully to the statements contained on the instrument.
4. Sampling bias.
5. Validity and reliability of the "Thompson-Davenport Adult Learner Survey."
6. BOG graduates may not be knowledgeable of the issues and purposes of the BOG program.

The following assumptions have been made about adult learners:

1. The population sample will be co-operative.
2. BOG graduates will respond truthfully to the statements contained on the instrument.
3. There is no sampling bias.
4. The "Thompson-Davenport Adult Learner Survey" is reliable and valid.

5. BOG graduates are knowledgeable of the issues and purposes of the BOG program.

Adult Learners are defined as a adult part-time learners who carry full-time adult responsibilities in addition to their studies. Nontraditional students may be referred to as adult students, re-entry students, returning students, and nontraditional students.

Nontraditional-Degree Program is (Undergraduate Catalog, p. 58) defined as a consortium program designed for mature adults, twenty-five and older, who need a flexible program to enhance career and personal goals.

Traditional-Degree Program is (Undergraduate Catalog, pp. 61-62) defined as a prescribed curriculum of courses that includes a total of 120 semester hours.

The results of the survey were tabulated, and the percentages of yes, no, and undecided were analyzed to determine the attitudes of adult learners' toward the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program. The Chi Square was used to determine the statistical significance at the .05 level.

Findings

The findings in the table show that the majority of adult learners agree that the BOG program meets their expectations and needs. Forty-two percent indicated that they would have enrolled in correspondence/tele-courses. Thirty-nine percent indicated that campus policies, procedures, student-life, and campus facilities do not meet the needs of nontraditional-degree students. Forty-two percent indicated that the BOG degree is more relevant than a traditional degree. Thirty-nine percent indicated that they were not discriminated against by campus officials over traditional students. Thirty-six percent indicated that nontraditional students were socially integrated with the traditional student body, and thirty-six percent were undecided. A significant number, fifty percent, indicated that their BOG degree led to faster career advancement. Sixty-one percent of the sample indicated that the BOG degree has just as mush prestige as a traditional degree.

This study suggests that expectations and needs of adult learners should, in some way, be investigated by campus officials to determine more goals, problems, additional needs, etc. Campus officials should address this question: How can we better serve adult learners?

TABLE I
RESPONSES TO ADULT-LEARNER SURVEY
Y = YES N = NO U= UNDECIDED

N = 36

		Y	N	U
1.	Classrooms were boring.	12 33%	18 50%*	6 17%
2.	I would have enrolled in correspondence- and/or tele-courses.	15 42%	12 33%*	9 25%
3.	I liked the "freedom" to take courses from several areas.	22 61%*	6 17%	8 22%
4.	I knew exactly what courses I wanted.	15 42%	16 44%*	5 14%
5.	I would have liked more evening- and weekend-course offerings.	17 47%	8 22%	11 31%*
6.	Nontraditional students were expected to work harder on class assignments.	13 36%	9 25%	14 39%*
7.	I enrolled in the BOG program to meet changing job requirements.	24 67%*	5 14%	7 19%
8.	I enrolled in the BOG program to advance in my current profession.	18 50%	10 28%*	8 22%
9.	I enrolled in the BOG program to seek a career change.	17 47%*	9 25%	10 28%
10.	I felt that my sequence of coursework has more relevance than a traditional major.	15 42%	14 39%*	7 19%
11.	I enrolled in the BOG program to quickly obtain a BA.	18 50%*	13 36%	5 14%

Y = YES N = NO U = UNDECIDED

N = 36	Y	N	U
12. On campus social activities were appropriate for both older students and our families.	13 36%	10 28%	13 36%*
13. There were suitable publications on campus for adult learners.	11 31%	7 19%	18 50%*
14. I felt like a "second-class" citizen in classes.	9 25%	12 33%*	15 42%
15. I felt that college policies, procedures, student-life, and campus facilities are to "cater" to traditional-age students.	13 36%	14 39%*	9 25%
16. I felt that faculty and staff favored traditional-age students.	12 33%	14 39%*	10 28%
17. Faculty and staff were prepared to meet the needs of adult learners.	12 33%	18 50%*	6 17%
18. Faculty often used my experiences as resources for traditional-age students.	12 33%	15 42%*	9 25%
19. My BOG degree has just as much prestige as a traditional degree.	22 61%*	9 25%	5 14%
20. The BOG degree lead to faster career advancement.	18 50%	10 28%*	8 22%
21. I would recommend the BOG program to other adult learners.	21 58%*	9 25%	6 17%

* Significance at the .05 level.

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